



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Proposal

The attached document contains the narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful proposal may be crafted. Every successful proposal is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Enduring Questions guidelines at www.neh.gov/grants/education/enduring-questions for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Education Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: NEH Enduring Questions Course on "What Is Time?"

Institution: St. Norbert College

Project Directors: Marcella L. Paul and Joel Mann

Grant Program: Enduring Questions

Intellectual rationale and teaching value

“From Chronos to tiempo: What is time?”

We are requesting funding for the development and implementation of a course at St. Norbert College constructed around the enduring question, “What is time?” This course will be offered to second and third-year students in the College’s Honors Program. The Honors Program is open to students from every major throughout the College.

The philosophical and literary preoccupation with time is born from a long-standing human obsession. We have always tried to measure time, and for good reason: our physical survival has depended on our ability to accurately read the seasons. However, our interest in time goes far beyond the observation of nature; our minds and spirits have demanded transcendence, a poetic reading of the natural cycles. Babies are born, grow old, and die; days grow longer, and then shorter; trees bud, bloom, and bear fruit: the natural world unceasingly proclaims the flow of *something*, the movement of *something*. In the Western world, we say that time “marches on,” that it “flows like a river,” but does it? Or is it going in a circle? Is what we call “time” a mental construct? If time *does* exist and *is* going somewhere, where is it taking us?

The interpretations of time are as diverse as the cultures and people who propose them. Are we following a linear path to Christ’s return, or nearing the end of the fourth, 5,125 year long “Watery World” of the Mayan cyclical long-count calendar? Is “time” the interlude between the big bang and the moment, approximately five billion years from now, when our sun becomes a supernova and swallows up the earth? Are there other “times” than ours?

This course will be built on the foundations of Drs. Mann and Paul’s areas of expertise, philosophy and Latin American literature respectively, and will focus on the Western philosophical understanding of time, the linear time of Christianity, and the cyclical time of the indigenous Americans, and how these visions of time have been presented in the arts. The core

readings represent a variety of viewpoints on the question “What is Time?” In addition to representations of time in literature, students will also view films and works of art in order to gain an understanding of different visual interpretations of time. By exposing students to multiple interpretations of time we hope to lead them to develop their own understanding of and possible answer to this enduring question. Both instructors will be reading and preparing from the attached bibliography. The bibliography expands upon the core reading list in order to provide the faculty teaching the course a thorough understanding of the relevant scholarship. We have also requested funding in order to attend two Philosophy of Time Society Forums that would greatly assist us in our development of the course:

The introduction of this course will come at a crucial point in the institution’s development. St. Norbert College is currently revising its General Education Program, completing a five-year strategic plan, and renovating the Honors Program. The new General Education paradigm proceeds from the College’s identity as a Catholic, Norbertine, and liberal arts institution. The academic portion of the Strategic Plan focuses on the centrality of the humanities to the liberal arts and explicitly sets a goal to have a majority of the College’s students major in the humanities. The Honors Program, which serves over 200 students, is undergoing a radical renovation; it has recently introduced a living-learning component, a common course for incoming honors students, and a senior honors project. The faculty are eager to develop and implement courses for honors students that reflect the goals and vision of the Honors Program and, at the same time, satisfy General Education requirements. These courses will be interdisciplinary, structured around a theme capable of engaging an eclectic group of bright students, intellectually challenging, and clearly linked to the College’s mission. Many honors students major in the natural sciences; “What is time?” is a topic that would challenge and engage these students while focusing on the humanities.

While this course would be designed for honors students, it would benefit the wider community as well. Dr. John Zubizarretta, the Director of both the Honors Program and Faculty Development at Columbia College, SC, and past President of the National Collegiate Honors Council, has often said that an honors program *is* faculty development; these courses offer faculty opportunities to experiment, to teach their passion, and to grow professionally. We also see the honors students themselves as “leaven,” essential to the enrichment of the greater college community.

Envisioned course design

The course would be a semester-long (15 week), 4-credit course. This class would meet for three 70-minute sessions per week. The material would be presented by theme rather than by chronological order: (1) What Shape is Time? (2) Sacred Time and Secular Time, (3) Our Experience of Time, and (4) Time in Postmodernity. Literary representations of time would be integrated into all units. Students would be expected to read 60-100 pages or the multimedia equivalent per week.

The first unit, “What Shape is Time?” would be foundational, introducing students to several different models of time: linear, cyclical, circular, and eternally branching. Students would read selections of Morey and Renfrew’s *The Archaeology of Measurement: Comprehending Heaven, Earth and Time in Ancient Societies*, and two chapters of Shahn Majids’ volume, *On Space and Time*, “The Nature of Time,” by John Polkinghorne, and “The Dark Universe,” by Andrew Taylor. Literary readings would include several short stories and essays by Jorge Luis Borges (for example, “A New Refutation of Time,” “Circular Ruins,” and “The Garden of the Forking Paths”) which present circular and branching models of time. Students may also view such artifacts as the Aztec calendar, sundials, and ancient and modern calendars.

The unit on the sacred and the secular would build on the foundation of the first unit. Students would explore the social and personal implications of different religious paradigms and contrast these sacred rhythms with the secular experience of time. Students would read selections of St. Augustine's *City of God*, a text that argues forcefully that the Christian view of time must be an irreversible process, moving from the creation towards the final judgment. They could compare this vision with selected poems by Christian mystics St. John of the Cross and St. Theresa of Avila that describe the "eternal moment". They may also view the short film, "Cyclical Time on Mount Athos", which explores the rhythm of the Christian year and worship as it follows the lives of monks in a small Greek village. The indigenous, cyclical understanding of time would be represented by readings from the *Popul Vuh*, which describes the Maya belief in concrete, identifiable cycles of creation, destruction, and short stories by Carlos Fuentes, including "Chaac Mool", which explore how this indigenous, cyclical rhythm of time may be experienced. Students could also examine artifacts, such as the *Book of Hours*. Selections of Richard Fenn's *Exposure: The Personal Experience of Time in Secular Societies* would serve as a foundation for the secular experience; students would also read literary selections, such as Octavio Paz's poem *Piedra de sol* (Sun Stone), in which the poet describes human history as a self-inflicted series of endless, tragic cycles of wars and injustice, T.S. Elliot's poems "Burnt Norton" and/or "Little Gidding" (poems 1 and 4 of *Four Quartets*) in which Elliot explicitly contrasts the human experience of time with the divine, and Pablo Neruda's "Walking Around," a reflection on the quotidian experience of the passage of time.

The unit "Our Experience of Time" would include a wide range of assignments that explore how trauma, emotion, and age affect our personal experience of time. We will choose from such selections as National Public Radio's broadcast, "Why Does Time Fly By As You Get Older?" Oliver Sacks' *Awakenings*, Christopher Nolan's film "Memento," and a longer

literary work that explores this theme (three possibilities would be Rebecca West's *Return of the Soldier*, Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation of a Beulah*, or Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*).

In order to approach "Time in Postmodernity" students would read Part 3 of David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity*, "The Experience of Space and Time." They would view Alejandro Amenábar's film "Abre los ojos" ("Open Your Eyes"), and examine paintings by Remedios Varo, or perhaps a Paul Pfeiffer video. Readings would include short stories by Julio Cortázar (for example "Secret Weapons" or "Blow-up") and/or a shorter, accessible novel (*Everything is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer, *The City of Glass* by Paul Auster, or *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien).

Many of the philosophical concepts as well as the literary selections will be challenging for the students – even honors students. Anticipating this difficulty, we are reviewing films and graphic texts that would grab students' attention, spark discussion, and afford an initial entry into difficult topics. Students will be assessed by traditional measures (quizzes over the readings and viewings, participation, and initial reflection essay), but would also prepare a final, creative project that would present their new understanding of time (for example a short story or a video). The effectiveness of this course will be assessed by standard student evaluations as well as honors assessment.

Plan of Work

From May to September 2012 we will read primary and secondary sources from the bibliography and hold regular meetings to discuss these readings and narrow down the course content. In October 2012 we will determine the core reading list. In the following two months we will re-read the core reading list and hold meetings to discuss these readings and identify key themes and potential pedagogical strategies. In January 2013 we will create the course syllabus and prepare supporting material and systems such as blogs, online course management

applications, library reserves. We will each teach a course in the spring semester of 2013 from January to May. We will spend June and July of 2013 reviewing the courses and making improvements in content and pedagogy. The course will be taught for a second time in the fall semester of 2013 from August to December.

Faculty Preparation

The idea for this course was born from a series of conversations about the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges between Dr. Marcella Paul, Associate Professor of Modern Languages, and Dr. Joel Mann, Assistant Professor of Philosophy. The work of Borges, and indeed of much 20th- and 21st-century Spanish literature (not to mention art, music, theater, and film), is clearly inspired by a feeling for ancient cultures fused with an interest in the history of philosophy. Dr. Paul, who earned a doctorate in Latin American narrative with a secondary concentration in Comparative Literature, came to see that philosophy could enrich her readings of the literary works she studies and teaches, while Dr. Mann came to appreciate the richness and cultural complexity of the literary and intellectual movements of which Borges is a part. One recurrent theme in these conversations was time—its nature, structure, perception, and depiction across cultures and writers. As a literary scholar, Dr. Paul was aware of the importance of temporality in analyses of narrative. Dr. Mann, the philosopher and historian of ancient Greek thought, understood the centrality of time and temporality in perennial metaphysical puzzles and had begun research into concepts of time in pre-Socratic philosophy and religion. They decided to begin working on a course to nurture in their students (and in themselves) a fuller appreciation of this literature and a deeper understanding of the philosophical problems so inseparable from it. To this end Dr. Paul and Dr. Mann will effectively tutor each other in their respective areas of study, building mutual competencies in literature and philosophy that will enable them both to teach all aspects of the course.

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Core Readings

Literature:

Augustine of Hippo. *The City of God*.

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Cortázar, Julio. Selected short stories including "Blow-up," "Secret Weapons," and "Axolotl."

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"To Her Portrait," "In Which She Warns a Rose," From *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Poemas*.

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Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity*.

Nabokov, Vladimir. *Speak, Memory*.

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West, Rebecca. *Return of the Soldier*.

Films:

"Cyclical Time on Mount Athos," American Public Media.

"Memento," Christopher Nolan, 2000.

"What Time is it Over There?" Ming-liang Tsai, 2001

"Open Your Eyes," Alejandro Amenábar, 2000.

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